DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 923 CG 019 455

TITLE Aging Action: A Course in Senior Advocacy in Kansas.
INSTITUTION Kansas State Advisory Council on Aging, Topeka.
PUB DATE Sep 85
NOTE 37p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advocacy; *Individual Power; Legislation; *Lobbying; Needs Assessment; *Older Adults; *Social Action

ABSTRACT

Skills useful in advocacy of senior citizens' needs are discussed in this manual. The topics included are: (1) the meaning of advocacy; (2) assertiveness training for aging-action; (3) identifying issues; (4) choosing issues; (5) developing a plan of action; (6) organizing; (7) legislative advocacy; (8) criteria to evaluate potential legislative objectives; (9) lobbying strategy checklist; (10) how a bill becomes a law; (11) successful legislative work; (12) how to be heard; (13) giving testimony at a public hearing; (14) ten commandments of state politics; (15) legislative telephone tree; (16) what makes points with legislators; (17) writing to your state legislator; (18) visiting your legislators and government officials; and (19) 12 steps toward effective advocacy for older Americans. (ABL)

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AGING ACTION

A Course in Advocacy in Kansas

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AGING ACTION

A Course in Senior Advocacy in Kansas

September, 1985

Prepared by
Kansas State Advisory Council on Aging
in cooperation with
Kansas Department on Aging
610 West Tenth
Topeka, Kansas 66612

John Carlin, Governor
Joyce V. Romero, Secretary

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INTRODUCTION

This course is about advocacy. It is about learning how to be more effective in one's own community, as an individual and within an organization, in working for positive social change. The involvement of Older Kansans in the decision-making process leads to a better informed and more capable senior population.

The overriding goal of any advocacy group is to impact the system on its own behalf.

Effective impact results from planned, organized, coordinated activity:

1. by a specific group
2. for a specific purpose
3. aimed at a specific target
4. at the appropriate time.

The skills discussed in this manual will be useful in both group problem solving and effective organization. Our thanks and appreciation are extended to the following organizations for their assistance in compiling the materials for these advocacy training manuals:

American Association of Retired Persons
Area Agency on Aging Board Chairpersons Assn.
Kansas Area Agency on Aging Directors Assn.
Kansas Coalition on Aging
Kansas Retired Teachers Assn.
Kansas Silver Haired Legislature
Kansas State Advisory Council on Aging
Washington State Bureau of Aging

Copies of this manual are available from the Kansas Department on Aging, 610 West Tenth, Topeka, Kansas 66612, 913-296-4986 (Topeka) or 1-800-432-3535.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy, in its simplest definition, is a process by which a person attempts to affect or influence someone else's behavior or attitudes in order to reach a goal.

As you can see advocacy involves action. The person doing the action is called an "advocate". The following is a list of key action words which can be included in the concept of advocacy:

- representing
- guiding
- counseling
- selling
- helping
- mediating
- listening
- promoting

Advocacy can take place on behalf of:

a) oneself
b) another individual
c) a group (e.g., residents of a certain area)
d) a class of people (e.g., all citizens over age 60)
e) the public interest (before the state legislature or a Governor's planning task force).

Some people feel reluctant to assume the role of an advocate because:

a. they are understandably nervous
b. they prefer "helping" people
c. they are confused by the complexities of the situation
d. they have never fought City Hall before
e. they don't believe they have a right to be heard
f. they simply have never thought of themselves as someone who could testify or mediate a dispute or represent their group before a board or commission.

Advocacy is:

1. Application of information and research utilized in a timely fashion and presented to the appropriate group.
2. Creation of strengths and cohesiveness among diverse elderly groups in a community that may become effective, articulate spokespersons.
3. Understanding the total community in which you function so that your perspective is maintained.
4. Social planning.
5. Consciousness raising.

Responsibilities of the Advocate:

1. To keep your perspective; to recognize goals are achieved in incremental steps.
2. To stay impersonal; to see oneself as a tool.
3. To have stamina; to be able to return for small increments of the whole plan.
4. To be able to negotiate, compromise and log roll.
5. To orchestrate a community.
6. To advocate for the issue and not for yourself.

ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING FOR AGING-ACTION

Basic Human Rights

1. You have the right to what you desire as long as it doesn't hurt someone else.
2. You have the right to "maintain dignity" even if it does hurt someone else.
3. You have the right to make a request of another person as long as you realize the other person has the right to say no.
4. You must realize that there are certain borderline cases in interpersonal situations where the rights aren't clear. But you always have the right to discuss the problem with the person involved, and so clarify it.
5. You have the right to attain your rights!

Proposed Rights For Older Kansans

As an OLDER KANSAN, I have:

the RIGHT to what I want as long as it doesn't hurt someone else.
the RIGHT to speak out on what I perceive as affecting me.
the RIGHT to keep my own council, make my own decisions and be responsible for them.
the RIGHT to say "NO" - and to grant this right to others.
the RIGHT to be informed; to know what is expected of me; about to happen to me; and be aware of how I effect others.
the RIGHT to make choices whether they are informed or not.
the RIGHT to be as active and alert as I possibly can.
the RIGHT to maintain my dignity and independence as a person.
the RIGHT to maintain my vigor and health and in the most effective way.
the RIGHT to participate in, be a part of and contribute to my community.
the RIGHT to be different and to express my individuality without reprisals.
the RIGHT to feel secure in my own home and community.
the RIGHT to defend my person, property, values and ideas.
the RIGHT to have fun, to enjoy that for which I have worked and saved; and to feel proud in doing so.

Knowing our rights is not enough. We must know and be able to use effective coping skills at the appropriate time and place. The following materials are guides in applying assertiveness in the aging field. The goals of assertiveness training are:

1. to be able to stand up for your basic human rights;
2. to develop a belief in your rights and recognize when they are infringed;
3. to be able to discriminate between appropriate assertive behavior and submissive or aggressive behavior; and
4. to develop and practice specific assertive skills.

Definition of Assertive Behavior

Standing up for your rights without infringing upon the rights of others through direct, honest and appropriate behavior.

Physical Components of Assertive Behavior

Tone of Voice:	A firm, confident, and appropriately loud tone marks assertive behavior.
Eye Contact:	Look straight at the person to whom you are speaking.
Body Expression:	Copy the French or Italian who use a lot of gestures as they talk.
Facial Expression:	Suit your expression to what you feel and say. Don't smile if you are criticizing someone or expressing anger. Conversely, don't look hostile or moody as you praise or love.

Eight Types of Assertive Behavior

1. Assertive Talk: If others infringe upon or ignore your needs or wishes, you are only asserting your own rights when you let them know. Examples: "I was here first," "I'd like more coffee, please," "Please turn down the radio," "This steak is well-done and I ordered it medium-rare," "Excuse me, but I have another appointment."

2. Feeling Talk: Expressing your likes and dislikes and being open and frank about your feelings is being assertive. Examples: "I'm awfully tired," "I fell angry when you don't hang up your clothes," "That's a neat outfit," "Your lecture really turned me on."

3. Greeting Talk: Being outgoing and friendly with people you like. Look and sound pleased when you meet them or talk with them on the phone. Examples: "Hi, how are you?" "How was your summer?" "I've missed seeing you." "I'm glad you called."

4. Learning to say "No": Almost all of us have certain situations where we find it difficult to say no and some of us almost always say yes and then regret it. You have a right to say no to a request you feel is unreasonable or to something you just don't want to do. There is no need to feel guilty nor to offer explanations or excuses.

5. Talking About Oneself: We are pretty well schooled to think that taking pleasure in personal accomplishments or relating our own experiences is a no-no. If we don't think well of ourselves, it isn't likely others will. When you have done something worthwhile or interesting, talk about it without monopolizing the conversation.

6. Accepting Compliments: A compliment sincerely given should be as sincerely accepted. To deny it is a put-down for the giver. A simple "thank you," is enough but appreciation for a compliment should be a part of every response. Example: "Thank you, I'm glad you like it. I have had it for years and have always enjoyed wearing it." "I wasn't sure the colors went well together, and I am glad you think they do."

7. Disagreeing Passively and Actively: Don't give overt signs of agreeing with someone when you do not. Change the subject, ask a question, or state your position without putting the other person down. Examples: "That surprises me. I have always found her very easy to work with." "If I understand what you are saying, I would have to disagree with your position."

8. Asking Why: It is your right to decide whether a request is reasonable or not. You may wish to ask for clarification, particularly when the person asking has a position of authority.

Selected Assertiveness Skills And Techniques

1. Broken Record: A skill that by calm repetition--saying what you want over and over again--teaches persistence without you having to rehearse arguments or angry feelings beforehand in order to be "up" for dealing with others.
   Benefits: Allows you to feel comfortable in ignoring manipulative verbal side traps, argumentative baiting, irrelevant logic, while sticking to your desired point.

2. Fogging: A skill that teaches acceptance of manipulative criticism by calmly acknowledging to your critic the probability that there may be some truth in what he says, yet allows you to remain your own judge of what you do.
   Benefits: Allows you to receive criticism comfortably without becoming anxious or defensive, while giving no reward to those using manipulative criticism.

3. Free Information: A skill that teaches recognition of simple cues given by a social partner in everyday conversation to indicate what is interesting or important to that person.
   Benefits: Allows you to feel less shy in entering into conversation while at the same time prompting social partners to talk more easily about themselves.

4. Negative Assertion: A skill that teaches acceptance of your errors and faults (without having to apologize) by strongly and sympathetically agreeing with hostile or constructive criticism of your negative qualities.
   Benefits: Allows you to look more comfortably at negatives in your own behavior or personality without feeling defensive and anxious or resorting to denial of real error while at the same time reducing your critic's anger or hostility.

5. Negative Inquiry: A skill that teaches the active prompting of criticism in order to use the information (if helpful) or exhaust it (if manipulative) while prompting your critic to be more assertive and less dependent on manipulative ploys.
   Benefits: Allows you more confortably to seek out criticism about yourself in close relationships while prompting the other person to express honest negative feelings and improve communication.

6. Self-Disclosure: A skill that teaches the acceptance and initiation of discussion of both the positive and negative aspects of your personality, behavior, lifestyle, intelligence, to enhance social communication and reduce manipulation.
   Benefits: Allows you comfortably to disclose aspects of yourself and your life that previously caused feelings of ignorance, anxiety, or guilt.

7. Workable Compromise: In using your verbal assertive skills, it is practical, whenever you feel that your self-respect is not in question, to offer a workable compromise to the other person. You can always bargain for your material goals unless the compromise affects your personal feelings of self-respect. If the end goal involves a matter of your self-worth, however, there can be no compromise.

Assertiveness and advocacy are both standing up for human rights in a direct, honest and appropriate fashion. By being a spokeperson you can take a stand to affect change.

IDENTIFYING ISSUES

An issue is a problem to be solved but every problem does not make a good organizing issue. Issues are problems about which many people feel strongly and about which they want to do something. In order for a problem to be a good issue it must have a solution that can be achieved by people working together.

When choosing an issue look at the following criteria:

1. Winning should result in a real improvement in people's lives.

2. Winning should give people a sense of their own power. People should feel they had an impact on the situation.

3. Winning should alter the relation of power. The group and its members should become a factor in future decision-making.

4. The issue should be strongly and deeply felt by the people working for the change.

5. The issue should be manageable. It must be something that is not too big for the group. If it is a major issue consider whether it has several components which can be worked on in steps.

6. The issue should affect a lot of people. The more people it affects, the larger the base of influence.

CHOOSING ISSUES

As many people as possible should be involved in this decision-making process. A list of issues or problems should include all those matters of primary concern to the participants in the area.

When an issue has been selected the group should decide what they will consider victory. It is important to have this understood so that if you receive only part of your request you will know whether to continue or to be satisfied with less than your original goal.

DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION

Once an issue has been selected the group needs to discuss which organization, agency or level of government is most likely to have responsibility or jurisdiction over the issue, i.e., your target. There may be more than one target. List them and be ready to move down the list if the first target will not help you make the needed change. A strategy should be developed on the most effective way to put pressure on the identified target to make the change you want.

In developing your strategy consider:

1) the group's internal resources -- time, money, knowledgeable individuals;

2) allies --- who will help you achieve your goal;

3) how achievable the goal is at this time --- assess the costs, potential competition with other issues, your group's relationship with the targeted agency, etc.

4) what are the strengths and weaknesses of your target; what people within the agency will be making the decision about your request.

There are many approaches (tactics) to use in attempting to influence the targeted agency. Petitions, community meetings, letter campaigns, press conferences and lobbying are just a few methods. The tactics you select should in part be based on the nature of the targeted agency. Tactics should always start out small and build as needed.

Tactics should also be chosen by the group rather than a small committee. Group members will be instrumental in putting the tactic into action and need to feel comfortable with that tactic. It is important to assign people different roles and responsibilities so that as many people as possible are involved.

ORGANIZING

As you develop a list of interested people you must also develop a structure for organizing their efforts. Preparation for the first meeting is critical to ensure that everyone becomes motivated to take an active role in the strategy and comes to subsequent meetings. The following checklist will help in planning and holding a meeting.

Planning the Meeting:

Why is the meeting necessary? What do you want to accomplish?

_____ To rally around a problem and plan strategies.

_____ To educate members about a particular issue which might become a group priority.

_____ To identify willing workers and delegate responsibilities.

_____ To disseminate information.

_____ To make decisions and plan action.

When and where will the meeting be held?

_____ Date

_____ Time

_____ Location

_____ Length of Meeting

Who will attend the meeting?

_____ Have they been notified?

_____ Have they been reminded?

Has an agenda been prepared?

_____ Is there enough time to cover all of the items?

_____ Has more than one person been consulted on planning the agenda, preferably all of the group 'regulars'?

_____ Has the agenda been distributed ahead of time?

_____ Is there a period for "open discussion?"

Have all other pre-meeting preparations been made?

_____ Have members who are giving reports been notified ahead of time?

_____ Have minutes from the last meeting been distributed?

_____ Have relevant written reports been distributed?

_____ Is there a chairperson and a recorder?

_____ Have rules for the meeting been set such as how decisions will be made; how often one person can speak on a subject, etc.

Holding The Meeting:

Chairperson should:

_____ Start the meeting on time.

_____ Introduce new members.

_____ State the purpose of the meeting.

_____ Review the rules and procedures.

_____ Go over the agenda; ask for additional items; be able to make a decision whether to add them to the agenda or put the decision to the group.

_____ Encourage participation.

_____ Keep the meeting on track.

_____ Make sure that members stick to the rules and procedures.

_____ Move the meeting along.

_____ Whenever appropriate, make sure that each agenda item is concluded with a plan of action, assignment, etc.

_____ End the meeting by summarizing what has happened, reviewing assignments, and stating what needs to be accomplished at the next meeting.

_____ If possible, set a date, time, and place for the next meeting.

After The Meeting

The chairperson and officers (if applicable) should meet to review and evaluate the meeting.

_____ Were the goals accomplished?

_____ Did the chairperson handle the meeting well?

_____ Were people interested; did they participate?

_____ Are people satisfied with the decisions that were made?

_____ Should a separate time be set up for free discussion so people can informally share their ideas and views?

_____ What can be done differently to get more done? To deal with disruptive members?

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Your group may decide that legislation is needed to solve your particular problem. The legislative process is a complicated one requiring a lot of organizing, strategy and basic hard work to push through a legislative proposal.

In the past decade we have witnessed the start of a new type of lobbying, the grass roots lobby. Elected officials are recognizing that they are accountable to their constituents. By mobilizing support from the voting constituents lobbyists can have a greater impact and improve the chance of a bill's passage.

The following guidelines will be helpful in developing a grass roots lobby.

Criteria to Evaluate Potential Legislative Objectives

1. Does it impact on the majority of all citizens?
2. Does it impact on the majority of elderly citizens?
3. What will the economic costs be?
4. What will the political costs be?
5. What is the legislative history of attempts to pass such legislation in the past?
6. What public relations value is there for your organization?
7. Is it good government?
8. Is it reasonable legislation?
9. Is it responsible legislation?
10. What is the appropriate level of government to act on this issue?

LOBBYING STRATEGY CHECKLIST

A. Laying the General Groundwork
   1. Understand how a bill becomes law.

   2. Learn the proper procedure for lobbying.

   3. Get a list of the legislature's standing committees and a list of all elected representatives with addresses and phone numbers.

   4. Establish a network of personal contacts with legislators.

B. Building Strategy for a Specific Issue
   1. Determine the timing considerations for introducing bills. Are there specific dates designated?

   2. Review documents and minutes regarding the committee which will be handling a particular issue.

   3. Review the voting history and background of committee legislators.

   4. Obtain copies of innovative well-written legislation from other states.

   5. Build a coalition of support among individuals and organizations around the state.

   6. Meet with committee legislators individually to present your views and to provide educational materials.

   7. Use experts from within and outside the state.

   8. Consider lobbying for public hearings on the bill.

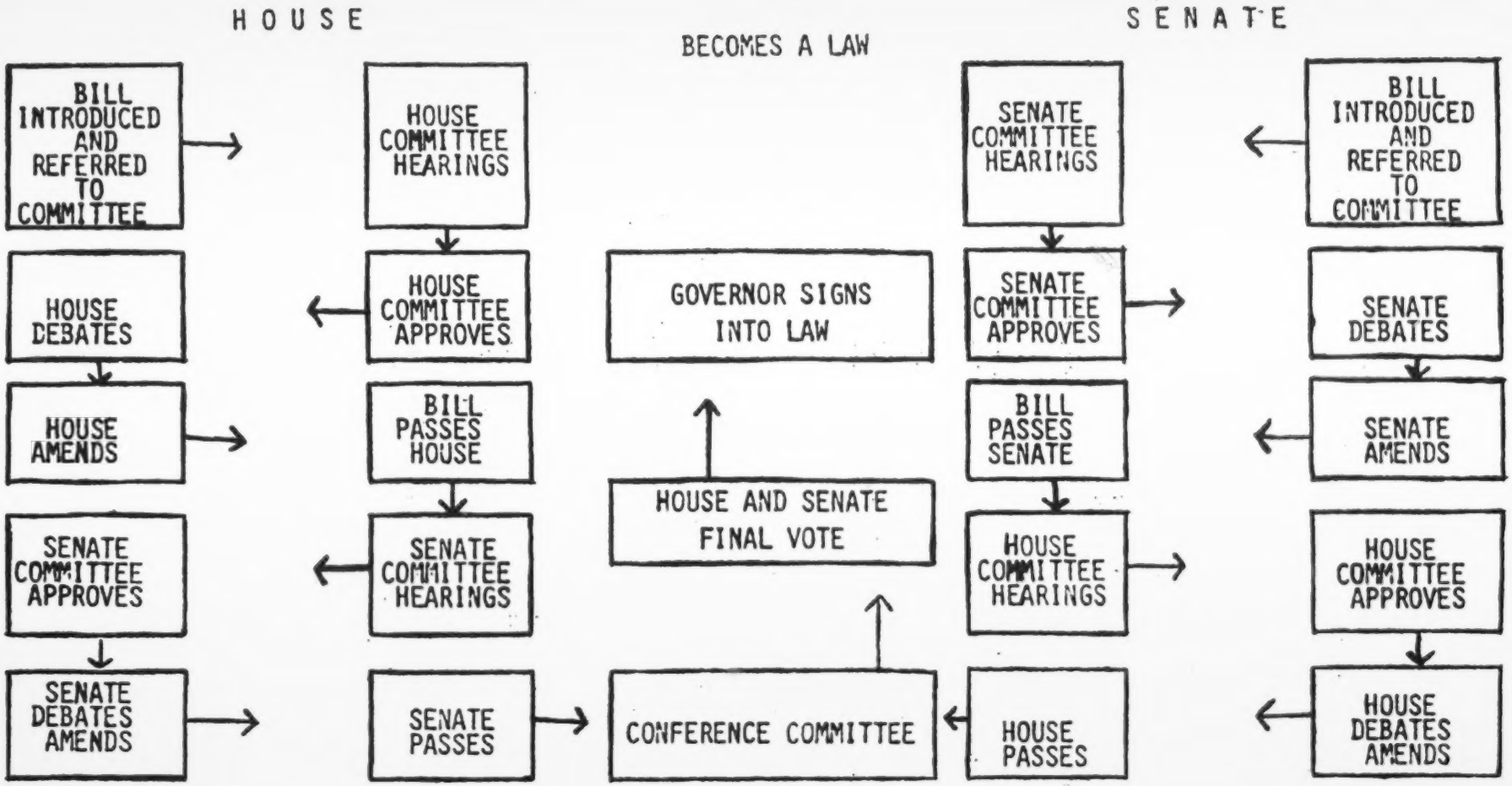
   9. Visit or write the editors of major newspapers, as well as local, to inform them of reforms you are seeking.

C. Organizational Nitty-Gritty
   1. Keep a written record of every meeting you have with a legislator, staff person, or committee.

   2. Always have enough copies of materials to give to each legislator.

   3. Meet or confer with your allies regularly to share information concerning who has been contacted and what responses you have received.

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



SUCCESSFUL LEGISLATIVE WORK

Your success depends largely upon how well you do your work at the local level. Your representatives in the State Capitol do their job well, but they can't do it all. You should "sell" your program on the basis of need. Convince your local legislators that the need exists in order to secure their help in getting the necessary changes in law, as well as the needed funds for programs.

Legislators Are People

1. They are not super-brains; they do not know everything about all issues.

2. They are not experienced in everything.

3. They are not interested in everything the legislature must consider.

Legislators Are Politicians

1. They know the political strength of local groups and the number of votes these groups can deliver.

2. They know it is impossible to create a "block vote" among elderly people.

3. They know that their attitude toward your group goals is only one factor in their political situation.

What Do You Want A Legislator To Do?

1. Most desirable - know and understand the details of your program and be a leader in the group working for it.

2. Next most desirable - know about your program, be in sympathy with it, and be willing to stand up and be counted.

3. Last - be willing to vote for all or most of the program.

How To Develop Your Legislators' Support

1. Explain the program to them.

2. Some will read it first and discuss it with you later.

3. Some legislators may show little interest until asked to speak on a program. Then, as they become informed through their research they will develop an interest.

Do's

1. Be thoroughly prepared yourself.

2. Know your legislators - their ideas, etc.

3. Arrange your meeting at a convenient time so that they will be able to concentrate.

4. Meet with them in small groups (3 to 4 persons) unless you plan to have them explain the program to the entire group.

5. Be sympathetic to their positions and to their opinions.

6. If they come through - show your appreciation.

Don't's

1. Demand that they do as you say.

2. Threaten or pressure them.

3. Be offended or upset if they disagree on parts of the program.

4. Beg - you don't have to. No "hat-in-hand" business is necessary or expected. You are representing a most important segment of the public and you are concerned with one of America's vital resources - its elderly.

Your purpose is to inform the legislators in a way that they realize the importance of your proposals and accept their responsibility.

HOW TO BE HEARD

The American Civil Liberties Union in 1971 urged members to join in enlisting public opinion in support of a particular piece of legislation. To "help turn our lobbying effort into a victory," the ACLU advised use of what it called "the proven technique below:"

1. Write your Senators and Congressmen, asking them to reply with statements of their positions.

2. Get to know the staff people in your Senators' and Congressmen's home offices. Tell them your views. They're an important channel.

3. Take advantage of weekends and congressional recesses to visit your Senators and Congressmen while they are at home from Washington.

4. Enlist friends and major supporters of your Senators and Congressmen to urge their support for the bill.

5. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper - an oft-forgotten free forum.

6. Urge local newspapers, television and radio to give editorial support for the bill.

7. Interest reporters and columnists in the problem in general and the bill in particular.

8. Form coalitions with other interested groups.

9. Get these and other community groups to issue statements endorsing the bill. Send this statement to your Senators and Congressmen. Ask them to read the statements and to insert them in the Congressional Record. Bring them to the attention of the press.

10. Urge your friends and associates, as well as your local ACLU affiliate, to join in any or all of these steps.

GIVING TESTIMONY AT A PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing is usually held when public officials at the city, county, state and/or federal level wish to formally request comments on a particular bill or issue. These meetings are sometimes required by law before a regulation or statute can be approved. In many jurisdictions, public hearings must be advertised in local newspapers for a specified time prior to the date of the hearing. In most instances, when a city or town, or county holds a public hearing, people may register their desire to testify or simply appear on the appointed day and request the opportunity to speak.

Before the actual writing of testimony, research must be done. If possible, find statistics to substantiate your arguments and suppositions. A basic outline may be helpful:

What is the need?
Who is involved?
What are the possible solutions?
Which is the preferable solution and why?
What is the practicality of the preferable solution?-cost?

It is necessary to write two papers; one for submission to the written record and the other an oral summary of the written testimony. The latter should be very brief, usually no longer than one page and should cover only the major points of the testimony.

In your testimony, begin with greetings to whomever you are presenting the testimony with special salutations to the chairman, vice-chairman, and the members; and then give thanks for the opportunity to speak and congratulations to the body holding the hearings.

You should then state who you are, who you represent and why you are appearing to give testimony. Then you should give your testimony which should answer the questions from the outline above. Conclude with a summary, a plea for action, and again thank whoever is hearing your testimony.

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF STATE POLITICS

1. Never lie or mislead a legislator about the relative importance of an issue or the opposition's position or strength. Your credibility rests on your honesty.

2. Look for friends in unusual places. In politics, a friend is a politician who helps you when you need help -- whether a Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative -- even if that politician is hostile to you 90% of the time.

3. Never cut off anybody from contact. Do not let a legislator consider you a bitter enemy because you disagree; today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally.

4. Do not grab credit. "Nothing is impossible if it does not matter who gets the credit."

5. Your word is your bond. Never promise anything you cannot deliver.

6. Do not waste time on opponents who are publicly committed to their position. It is more productive to lobby legislators who are least committed or who claim to be neutral or keeping an open mind.

7. Never forget to notice and thank anyone who has helped you.

8. Do not gossip. Knowing legislators' peculiarities and peccadilloes is one thing; talking about them is another. Remember that discretion is the better part of valor.

9. "When you are crossed politically, don't get mad. Get even." (Bobby Kennedy) The power of the ballot box is yours.

10. Carry a rabbit's foot. In lobbying you can know your opponent; you can develop imaginative and reasonable compromises; you can burn the midnight oil to digest all the arguments; but it can all go right down the drain if you don't have a little luck.

LEGISLATIVE TELEPHONE TREE

When you receive a telephone call with the request to mobilize your legislative telephone tree, your quick response is vital. A "break" on your branch of the tree will deny other members the opportunity of expressing their concerns about legislation.

1. Your list should have your name on the space at the far left. Your assignment is to call the five persons listed in the second column.

2. Write down all of the information given to you by the person who contacted you. This may include some or all of the following:

    a. Legislator(s), addresses, or telephone numbers to which letters, telegrams, or calls should be directed;

    b. Bill number or subject of the bill;

    c. Suggested message; and

    d. Deadline for contacting your legislators, if not immediate.

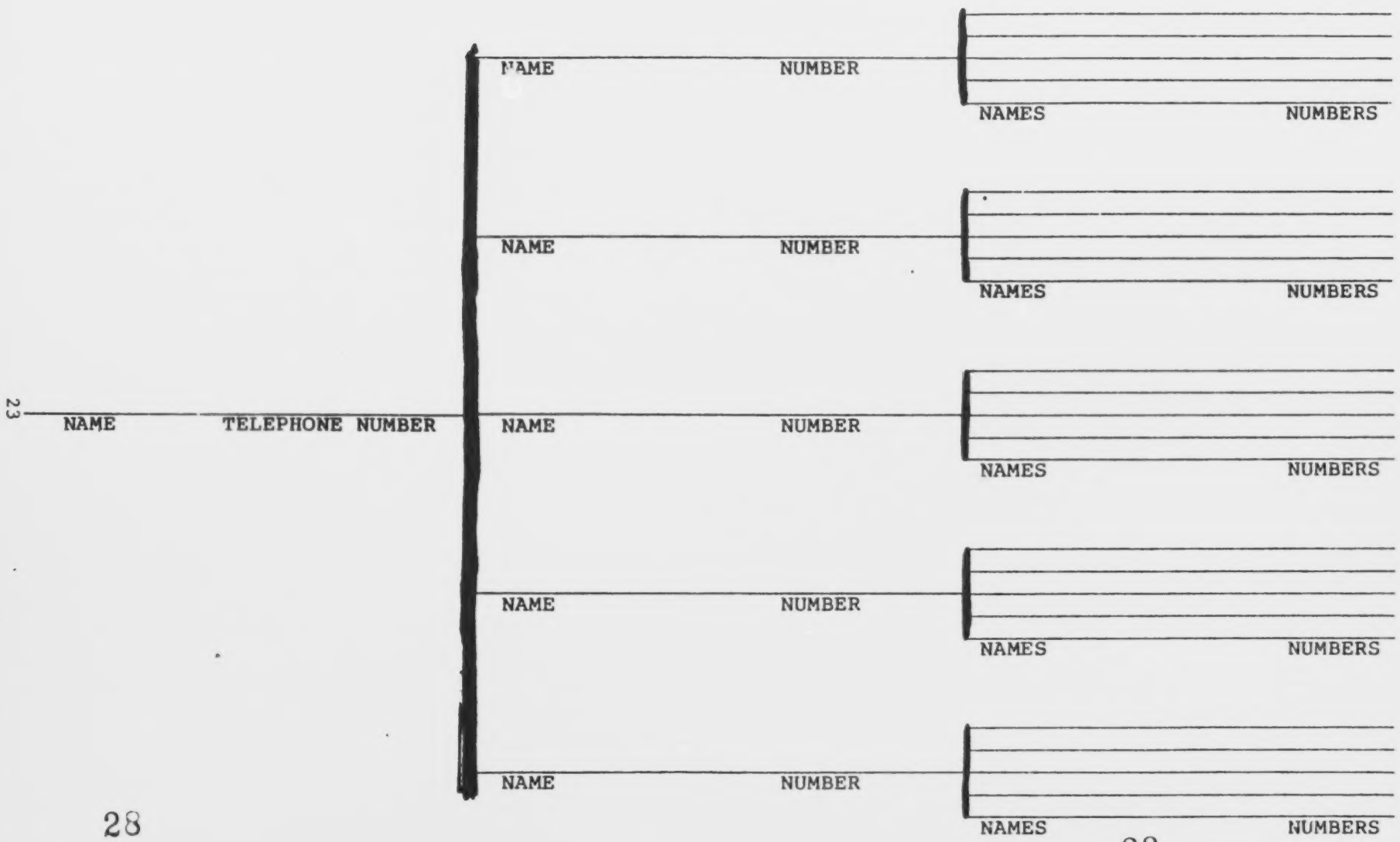
3. Immediately call or contact the persons listed in the second column. Ask them to write down the information which you have been given and to call the persons on their branch.

4. If you are unable to reach an individual after making several attempts, go on to the persons in column three. They will contact others on their branch. If you finally reach the person in column two, tell them who you have contacted.

5. Thank those you contact for their concern and quick response, and finally ...

6. Sit down, and contact your legislator.

LEGISLATIVE TELEPHONE TREE



WHAT MAKES POINTS WITH LEGISLATORS

1. Brevity - In order to be effective, your presentations must be short. Whether your presentation is simply an informal conversation with a legislator in the hallway or a very structured presentation before an Appropriations Committee, it should be emphatic and to the point. You should always, of course, introduce yourself and state who you represent, the extent of your interest and involvement with a particular issue and why you believe there is a need for some specific legislation to address the problem.

2. Accuracy - Always give accurate information. The credibility of your testimony depends on the accuracy. If you cannot supply documentation to support your claim, don't make the statement. Since most of the issues you will be supporting will require repeated interaction with legislators, administrators or staff in the Governor's Office, it is best to start with a correct base of information. If you do not proceed in this manner, it is possible that you will be confronted with a skeptical attitude thereafter which will be very difficult if not impossible to turn around.

3. Preparation - Be prepared. Anticipate questions. Before you go to the legislator, the governor or the director of an aging program, have your thoughts organized. Remember too, that the burden of proof is on you and in order for you to be effective, you must establish by clear and convincing evidence your position.

4. Courtesy - Be polite, not demanding. Too often, advocates of a particular issue alienate entire legislative committees even though some of the members may have been in agreement with the position of the advocate originally. This change in attitude often occurs because the advocate was rude, hostile or confrontive. Might does not make right.

5. Appreciation - Thank legislator. Too often, we ask legislators to act in our interest but we then fail to express our appreciation. When your legislator does something for you, respond accordingly with a note of gratitude.

HOW DOES ALL OF THIS ACTIVITY APPEAR TO STATE LEGISLATORS?

Basically, most legislators view special interest groups with a "What do you want and what's in it for you?" attitude. You have an advantage over other aging advocates because you are a member of the constituent group and should therefore know what you need and what is best for you. In addition, because you are a volunteer, your opinion is more valued because you represent what you believe.

WRITING TO YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS

The Power Of A Letter

Public officials and business executives admit that mail influences their decisions or strengthens their positions. At one time or another, congressmen and state legislators have changed their minds, TV shows have stayed on the air, city officials have picked up trash -- all because enough people took the time to write.

Today, being a state legislator is a complex and time-consuming job. The number of bills introduced in one session can exceed 3,000. Some of these bills are very lengthy. Legislators cannot be experts on every bill, so they depend upon information and opinions of interest groups and those they represent to determine their positions.

You perform a useful service for your elected representatives when you write them to express your views on governmental activity. They appreciate knowing how proposed legislation will affect constituents, what their problems are and how they feel about various issues. Your civic responsibility ends not at the ballot box but at the mail box.

Your letters will have a greater impact if you follow these suggestions:

1. Letters to elected officials should be short. They are most effective when brief and to the point. It is best to discuss only one issue in a letter. If you are writing about a particular bill, identify the issue or bill by popular title or bill number.

2. Concentrate on writing your own legislators. Legislators routinely forward all letters they receive from outside their area to the appropriate office. The only exception to this rule occurs when you write to a committee which is considering a bill. In this case, you may address a letter to the committee chairman. If your legislator is on that committee, you should also write to him or her.

3. Avoid signing petitions or signing or sending a form letter. It is better to write a personal letter. Government officials are seldom persuaded by form letters and petitions. In fact, they are often annoyed or angered by such devices and refuse to read them. Type your letter if your handwriting is difficult to read. Be sure to sign your letter and include your return address on the letter as well as on the envelope.

4. Proper timing is important if your letters are to be effective. When you want to let elected representatives know which issues are important to you, you should write early in the proceedings of the proposed action. When you want an elected representative to vote for or against a particular action, you should allow enough time for your letter to reach him or her before the issue comes up for a vote.

5. In your letter, identify who you are and tell briefly why you are writing. Tell your officials what you think about the issue. A letter that simply says you are for or against a bill is not as helpful as one that details reasons for your view. Be brief, but tell them how it would affect you and your friends. Request that your elected representative take some specific action (i.e., vote for a bill, vote against a bill, hold a hearing, report a bill out of committee).

6. Do not threaten. Reason works better than coercion. Legislators react negatively to threats just as you do.

7. Do not expect or request an immediate commitment. The nature of the legislative process involves change and bills undergo many changes before they are finally voted upon. Because of this it is important that we be concerned with the concepts of bills and their contents rather than arbitrary numbers or titles. Tell your views; what you want in a particular bill; and ask that your legislator consider them.

8. Do not be a "pen pal". Sending a weekly message to your legislators will have less effect than a few well written letters. Frequent letters from the same person may, in fact, have a negative effect.

9. Thank your government officials. You should write on occasion to your government officials thanking them for assistance or for voting for an action that you wish to see passed. Like you, they like to be appreciated for the things that they do.

VISITING YOUR LEGISLATORS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

There are three basic ways of letting your elected representatives and government officials know who you are and what your needs are: person-to-person visits, letters, and (in emergencies) telegram and telephone calls.

Person-to-person visits are the most effective way of letting your elected representatives know you and your needs. Once your governmental officials know you, they pay more attention to your letters and calls.

When you get to your government official's office (call in advance if possible for an appointment) ask to meet your representative and/or an administrative assistant. Tell your representative or the assistant who you are and tell him or her briefly of your needs. Give your representative specific information and tell him or her how the issue you are concerned about affects you and your friends. Also tell the official about how past legislation or governmental action has helped you and your friends. Your elected representative will appreciate hearing about how something the local government has done is working.

You might also ask to be put on his or her mailing list for newsletters if one exists.

In briefing your governmental officials about your needs, these suggestions may be helpful:

1. Do your homework first. Read background materials from many sources. Be versed in detail about the issue(s) you wish to discuss so that you can answer specific questions that your representative may ask.

2. Plan your briefing carefully and keep it brief. Give your elected representative as much chance as possible to ask questions.

3. Supply individual fact sheets on issues and needs that are urgent and/or complex. Try to boil each issue or case down to a single page.

4. Stress who will be served and helped by the proposed action.

5. Ask for specific support.

Other Tips:

The success of a legislative program is contingent upon the initial contact you will be making with members of the Legislature before the session convenes. This initial contact is important because future correspondence with your legislators during the session will have more influence on their thoughts and actions if they know you, what you stand for, and how concerned you are about issues at hand.

Below are some rules for a successful coffee and doughnut friendshipping session:

1. Limit the group to 10 or 12 people.
2. Keep the meeting informal.
3. Be a good listener.
4. Keep the meeting short.
5. Thank the Legislator for his past assistance.
6. Contact the Legislator's office for general advance information about schedules.
7. Confirm the date and time of the activity via a letter to the Legislator's office or home.
8. Send announcements to a limited group with the request that they let you know whether or not they will attend.
9. Request that guests arrive 15 minutes before the scheduled arrival of the Legislators.
10. Introduce the guests to each other.

When the Legislator arrives, the host or hostess should be certain that the Legislator meets each guest. After the introductions, it might be most convenient to have the Legislator and guests place chairs in an informal circle and discuss the issues very briefly.

Several members of the audience should be primed to ask questions to keep the conversation moving smoothly and without awkward pauses. A letter of thanks to the Legislator for his appearance would be appreciated.

TWELVE STEPS TOWARD EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY FOR OLDER AMERICANS

Step 1: Don't Give Up On Yourself

You begin by not letting yourself be frightened away or discouraged from doing what you think is right. Confront your own attitudes and rationalizations for doing nothing.

Step 2: Don't Let Others Get You Down

Officials in government agencies, institutions, and systems like nursing homes, hospitals and courts are often rigid and fixed. They resist any changes in their patterns of doing business. When they feel threatened, they will dig in their heels and insist they are right. Many will honestly feel they know better than you what is good for older persons. Others will be happy with the way things are now and will not want to rock the boat. Whatever the reasons and whatever the excuses they give you to make you go away--DON'T. Try to predict their excuses and resistances. Come in prepared to answer their protests.

Step 3: Pick a Problem

How do you know what change to support? The first thing you need to do is to be specific. Pick one problem that is important to you and to your constituency. The best place to start is close to home. Think about your older friends and family. What do they need that they are not now getting? That is where advocacy begins for you.

Step 4: Break the Problem into Small, Manageable Pieces

Don't try to take on the whole world at once. You'll simply get overwhelmed and fail. Avoid the tendency to see the problems of older persons in global or general terms. Start small, even though you see the bigger picture.

Step 5: Get the Facts

Homework is the key to effective advocacy. Unless you know the FACTS, you may not know when an official is not being honest with you. You may not have the confidence to press further. You may become flustered in a meeting and will more likely back off than stick to your guns. You will not change the things that hurt older persons merely by saying that they are wrong.

Step 6: Figure Out Who's Who

As you collect the facts, certain names will come up. Some you will recognize, like the governor or the nursing home administrator. Others you may never have heard before. Keep a list of all the players. Draw a chart to help you understand where decisions are made and exactly who has responsibility for making them. Be sure to keep names, addresses, and phone numbers.

Step 7: Put the Information Together

If you've made some phone calls, gone to some meetings, and talked with others who share the problem you are working on, pretty soon you will have a lot of information: facts, figures, names, dates, phone numbers, bits and pieces of the story and what happened. Since a lot of the material may be new to you, it is a good idea to sit down and take stock of what you have learned. You may find you want to put the information together in some formal way for presentation to your group, other groups, officials, or to the general public.

Step 8: Decide What You Want

Be constructive and not just critical. Ask what is available. Ask what current laws mandate. Press for their enforcement. Have some recommendations that can be acted on immediately within existing laws and programs and with little or no new money. Have others that may take a little longer to implement and still others that involve long-range planning and goals. Recommended changes should be aimed at many levels of government--federal, state, and local--and many different programs that have an impact on the problems of older persons.

Step 9: Try to Change Things--Nicely

Once you have the facts, know who is responsible, and figure out what you want to do, then you are ready to try to change things. Start with the person closest to the problem. And start by being cooperative. Don't assume officials or professionals are against you or your group until you are shown this is so. Go in expecting that you and professionals will help each other solve your group's problems.

Step 10: When That Fails--Insist

If your first attempt fails, DO NOT GIVE UP. Change is a slow process. Bureaucracies often win because they think you will go away after one or two attempts. Don't expect miracles, but don't go away. Persist.

Step 11: Use Every Advocacy Tool You Can

There is no one way to change things. Another key to effective advocacy is to be flexible enough to use different tactics or approaches when you see a target of opportunity. There are a lot of ways to insist that officials change. And these differ from community to community, from time to time. Don't rule any of them out before you have considered whether they will help you argue your case effectively.

Step 12: Keep Watching

Getting changes is hard. Retaining them is hard too. Things have a way of slipping back into the patterns that existed before. That is why you must keep watching the laws, policies, and practices that are important to older persons. Even after you win, don't give a sigh of relief and move on to another topic. Always watch how things are really working. Watching, or monitoring, is an ongoing task for advocacy to be effective for the continuing needs of older citizens.